

Running a Green Business: A Checklist for Action

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IN-HOUSE MEASURES

BUILDING DESIGN AND RENOVATION

Make your own facilities as green as possible. All company facilities should be energy-efficient and otherwise environmentally responsible. For example, large facilities can strive for a high score in the LEED Rating System.

Build demonstration facilities. Model homes, field offices, job-site trailers, and other facilities that have public visibility should serve to demonstrate your company values and technical know-how when it comes to green design. PV power on job-site trailers, for example, will give your company experience with this power source, while providing that important demonstration role with both the public and subcontractors.

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TRANSPORTATION/TRAVEL

Encourage employee use of public transit. Provide passes, reimbursement, or other incentives for public transit use by employees.

Encourage carpooling or vanpooling. Provide incentives for employees to set up carpools or use company-organized vanpools. More convenient parking for carpools and providing free coffee and newspapers in vanpools are examples of incentives that could be provided.

Provide for bicycle and pedestrian commuting. Provide under-cover, secure storage for bicycles. Provide shower and changing facilities for employees wanting to bicycle, jog, or walk to work.

Pay employees not to drive. Consider allowing employees to opt for extra pay instead of a parking space "benefit" as a way to encourage alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle commuting.

Provide for telecommuting. Permit employees to work from home regularly or periodically. This not only reduces environmental impacts of commuting but also can improve efficiency and avoid time lost in traffic congestion. Provide home Internet connections and laptop computers to facilitate this.

Avoid some travel through teleconferencing. More and more options are becoming available for tele- or video-conferencing. These can save tremendous amounts of energy associated with air travel.

Allow flex time for traffic peak smoothing. By providing flexible work hours, time (and gasoline) wasted in traffic congestion can be reduced.

Provide higher mileage reimbursement for fuel-efficient cars. Encourage employees to purchase fuel-efficient vehicles by linking the reimbursement rate to the miles per gallon achieved by the employee's vehicle.

Buy energy-efficient vehicles. If your company owns vehicles, be sure to include fuel economy as one of the selection criteria. Also consider alternative fuels and gasoline-electric hybrids.

Choose green hotels when on the road. When traveling, try to select hotels that adhere to strong environmental principles, or actively make your stay greener. If your hotel does not offer a specific option of not changing linens each night, for example, leave a note on the bed to that effect.

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PURCHASING

Buy recycled paper. Select the highest-recycled-content paper that meets your requirements. When some virgin fiber is required for photographs or fine resolution, consider wood fiber content that is certified through Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards.

Buy energy-efficient office equipment. Choose Energy Star-rated office equipment and appliances, or go beyond Energy Star standards, choosing products with the highest efficiency ratings available.

Compare EnergyGuide labels, energy factors, heating season performance factors, and other measures

of energy performance.

Buy reusable dishes, utensils, and hand towels. Avoid disposable plastic and paper products whenever practical, and limit use of paper towels. Encourage employees to use their own mug for water, coffee, or tea.

Buy secondhand office furniture. Buying used furniture saves the energy and raw materials needed to manufacture new products. A number of companies market refurbished office furniture (see the EBN GreenSpec directory).

Buy natural or low-toxic cleaning and maintenance products. Help to maintain a healthy indoor environment by purchasing cleaning fluids, detergents, floor waxes, paints, and other products that offgas little, if any, VOCs, formaldehyde, and other potentially harmful compounds.

Buy "green power." If available in your area, purchase green electricity (generated from renewable energy sources).

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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Recycle. Maintain an active and rigorous in-house recycling program for office paper, cardboard, beverage containers, toner cartridges, and any other products for which there are local recycling options. Extend recycling programs to the job site as well.

Promote "paperless operations." Encourage company-wide use of e-mail; electronic invoicing and billing; "extranets" for communicating about projects among design team members; Web-based and electronic marketing; e-ticketing for travel; electronic transfer of building plans, etc.

Use responsible cleaning procedures and materials. Use low-impact cleaning practices or choose a green cleaning service to maintain a healthy indoor environment while minimizing environmental impacts.

Practice low-impact landscaping. Avoid chemical fertilizers and pest control; use water-efficient irrigation or practice xeriscaping; avoid two-cycle engine use when possible (lawn mowers, leaf blowers, edge trimmers, chain saws); use native plantings that will support diverse wildlife.

Maintain equipment. Follow rigorous maintenance schedules to maintain mechanical equipment in optimal working order and rated energy efficiency. This means regular replacement of filters, cleaning of compressor coils, burner tune-ups, lubrication of pumps and motors, proper vehicle maintenance, etc. Recycle waste oil and solvents, and use biodegradable lubricants and hydraulic fluids.

Avoid wasting energy after-hours. Instruct employees to shut down all office equipment at the end of the day or during prolonged periods of inactivity—and not to disable energy-saving features on personal computers and other Energy Star equipment. Make sure HVAC equipment is configured to set-back temperatures and ventilation rates after-hours. Programmable thermostats for smaller offices and more sophisticated energy management and control systems for larger buildings are recommended. Make all employees aware that *screen-savers do not save energy*.

Establish a company "green team." For larger companies, establishment of a company-wide standing committee addressing greening initiatives is an excellent way to efficiently incorporate environmental planning into a company. (Green teams can also be used to help incorporate green measures into the company's design and construction projects.)

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ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS AND PROGRESS

Calculate company "carbon balance." Carry out careful accounting of environmental impacts of business operations. The easiest starting point is to assess carbon emissions from energy use in company buildings and vehicles, airline travel, paper use, and so forth.

Develop a plan to reduce carbon emissions. Set goals for reducing carbon emissions and track company progress in achieving those goals.

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EDUCATION

Educate employees. Provide employees with in-house environmental education. Invite speakers to

your office to address green design. When practical, set up opportunities for experts addressing company employees to also address the general public in your area.

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OFF-SITE MEASURES

Incorporate environmental issues into business planning. Improving corporate environmental sustainability should be a part of your mission statement and a component of strategic planning of the company. Environmental criteria, for example, could become a key factor in project selection.

Encourage employee participation in local environmental initiatives. Make it possible for employees to participate in local planning committees, to hold local office, or to volunteer time for Habitat for Humanity or a building materials exchange. Identify community activities for which employees can volunteer time during paid hours (say, two hours per week).

Play a proactive role in the community. Your company could be an agent of local environmental action. If there is a problem with sprawl in the area and your company has planning expertise, for example, consider sponsoring a visioning workshop in the community to identify solutions. In addition to making your community a better place to live and work, such efforts can have significant public relations benefits.

Work with other businesses in bringing about environmental change. Find other, like-minded companies and organizations in your community or region that you can forge alliances with to broaden your impact. There might even be opportunities for bulk purchasing of recycled paper and other green products as a way to bring prices down.

Establish a progressive corporate giving program. There are many vitally important nonprofit organizations deserving of our support. Both direct corporate giving and the matching of employee donations should be considered if your company is profitable.

Provide pro bono services. As a form of corporate giving, consider donating design or construction services to nonprofit organizations and other worthy causes.

Consider offsetting environmental impacts. If you have calculated your company's "carbon balance," a next step is to try to offset some of those impacts. A few companies sponsor tree planting to offset in-house carbon emissions or the wood used in projects they design or build.